

ARS GRATIA ARTIS

V 5.0

Written by

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1 EXT. NEW YORK ART GALLERY - NIGHTED 1

A leafy street in a fashionable, upmarket, district. A small, but exclusive, gallery is holding a showcase

- as the ELITE OF NEW YORK'S ART and FASHION SCENE arrive.

2 INT. A NEW YORK ART GALLERY - NIGHT 2

A couple of photographers take snaps of the beautiful, vainglorious, and wealthy, sharing polite conversation, canapés, and boasts.

Glitterati mingle amongst avant-garde offerings of dubious artistic merit - photographs and sculptures begging to seem profound.

Beyond, a flickering old CRT television loops footage of an elderly man slurping beans. Beside it, a Christmas tree familiar from childhoods spent wishing for better years ahead...now decorated with stuffed animals mottled grey from age and sorrow.

And the living installations - a camo-painted nude man writhing on raw meat, while across the room a woman squeals like swine from all fours atop a banquet table.

Wandering through stands LEONARD GELLER (20s), whose thrift store jacket and two-day stubble betray his struggles to fit this extravagant scene. He squints at a canvas of aesthetic drivel - just red dots fading into oblivion.

Leonard tosses back a crab cake, washing it down with champagne. Half-drunk, he grabs another from a passing server.

Beside him, a PRETENTIOUS MAN and a WOMAN feast their eyes on the painting.

PRETENTIOUS WOMAN

Such a banquet of aesthetics. The transition from red to white is so stark. It takes my breath away.

PRETENTIOUS MAN

(to his date)

It almost seems to say... when viewed from a distance we are a collective, but up close we are all so alone.

## PRETENTIOUS WOMAN

To be able to say so much with so little... astounding. It's such a brave statement.

Leonard scoffs at their analysis, and then takes a breath and steels himself. He pulls out a BUSINESS CARD and turns to the PRETENTIOUS PAIR. He's nervous; no good at self-promotion, or being friendly.

## LEONARD

(clears his throat, tries to act sober)

Hi. Sorry to bother you. I'm Leonard Geller.

They look him up and down, as if he's just wandered in off the street. Which, in a way, he has.

They focus in on a lump of crab cake on the front of his shirt. He quickly brushes it away.

## LEONARD (CONT'D)

I represent an up and coming local artist down in Greenwich who is --

The group turns and shuffle away.

## LEONARD (CONT'D)

-- producing seriously amazing work. Fine.

(shouting after them)

Yeah, That's not remotely rude. Pedestrian art club members!

He gets a few sideways looks, drawing attention. They quickly turn back to their drinks and conversation.

Leonard sighs, defeated. The Man offers a quick glance over his shoulder, looking down his nose.

Leonard wanders a short distance and finds --

CHRISTINA (mid-20's, fashion-forward but with a similar out-of-place feel and a geek-chic flare).

Christina looks at a painting, tilts her head side to side.

## CHRISTINA

Does this look like it was hung upside-down?

LEONARD

Everything here is upside down...  
or incomplete. Or just plain bad.

CHRISTINA

Are you drunk?

LEONARD

It was the only way to survive this  
carnival of garbage.

CHRISTINA

Well it's not a good look.

LEONARD

Then I'm in good company.

She pats his back.

CHRISTINA

How much interest have you had?

LEONARD

In my art? Zero. Because these  
losers wouldn't know true talent--

-- Turns to a passing group of collectors--

LEONARD (CONT'D)

-- IF IT BIT THEM ON THE DICKS!

CHRISTINA

You're gonna get us thrown out.

LEONARD

I don't care.

CHRISTINA

Yes, you do.

LEONARD

I care about you. You're the only  
one who believes in me. Why should  
I waste time on these bloviating  
parasites?

Christina smiles at him, full of love and empathy. She takes  
his arm, and they move to the next piece.

CHRISTINA

Try not to lose hope.

LEONARD

How can I lose hope when I didn't  
have any to begin with?

He sighs, heavy.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

My parents were right. I'm never  
going to make it.

Christina squeezes his arm, sympathetically.

Art dealers scan the crowds' reactions as they look to  
complete their investment portfolios.

As the pretentiousness practically oozes all around--

DING-A-LING-A-LING!

All eyes turn to THE CURATOR lightly shaking a COW BELL for  
everyone's attention .

The room's murmurs fall silent.

GEORGE DAWN smiles at them all. A barrel chested "artist" who  
is utterly full of himself.

He soaks in the adulation as everyone turns to him.

Once the room falls silent, he claps his hands.

DAWN

Thank you all for attending this  
launch presentation of my new  
collection, "THE CRY OF THE STAR  
WANDERER".

Light applause --

Except Leonard, who takes a champagne off a passing tray and  
downs it. He's boiling with anger and resentment now.

DAWN (CONT'D)

All the pieces seen here tonight  
will be available exclusively  
through DeeAnna Silk, who I don't  
need to tell you is one of the most  
prestigious art dealers in the  
world.

The crowd erupts with CLINGS of rings against glasses and  
chatter of awe.

DAWN (CONT'D)

DeeAnna saw talent in me at a young age, and I hope I have rewarded that faith over time. To DeeAnna.

Dawn raises a toast to DeeAnna - who is standing beside the stage wearing monochrome make-up, and RIDICULOUS HAT that looks like an inverted cone, filled with ping pong balls.

Christina looks over to Leonard and sees his mood is souring further.

LEONARD

It should be me up there in the spotlight.

CHRISTINA

Be patient. Stay calm.

LEONARD

(loudly)

Fuck patience! Fuck staying calm!

All heads turn to Leonard. Christina sags, groans.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

That's it, get a good look at a genuine talent!

A panicked Dawn nods over to two SECURITY GUARDS.

-- They come over to Leonard, each putting a hand on his arm.

SECURITY

Sir, we're going to have to ask you to leave.

LEONARD

Fine. I was going anyway!

He shrugs off their grip, turns to the crowd.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

If you want to see some real art, here's where you can find me, fuckers!

He throws a handful of his business cards into the crowd. Nobody picks them up.

To silence, he storms out of the gallery, slamming the door behind him.

Out on Christina. She sighs, heavy, and follows.

3

INT. LEONARD'S STUDIO - MORNING

3

TITLE CARD: SOMEWHERE IN JERSEY

Off-Beat music plays.

Leonard rents a big industrial space - high ceilings, concrete floors, not much furniture. More garage than apartment. But he makes art, not comfort, his priority.

Place looks messy - paint tubes, brushes, sketch pads scattered about. But the chaos fuels creation. His paintings and sculptures fill the room, incredible stuff way better than the junk at fancy galleries. Real talent.

In one corner, shielded by metal sheets, Leonard precision-crafts a large crystal sculpture, glass-blowing torch in hand. His mastery over the medium approaches sorcery.

Throughout the studio, completed works showcase Leonard's abilities. Amongst the beauty, Christina emerges fresh from a shower - ponytail tightened, ready to squeeze herself into slacks and blouse for another cube-bound day.

CHRISTINA

How's the head?

LEONARD

The head is fine. The heart not so much.

CHRISTINA

Hang in there, baby. It's gonna happen.

LEONARD

How? Apparently it's not enough to just be an artist these days. You need to be a incorrigible showman.

CHRISTINA

You made quite a show of yourself last night.

Leonard shrugs.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

What's your schedule today?

LEONARD

Shift at Falbo's at 10, meeting you at 7, shift at Minnie's at 9.

(MORE)

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Fixing my dad's computer somewhere  
in between. Oh, when will this  
glamour end?

CHRISTINA

Well, I have another exciting day  
of translating numbers into plain  
English, so, you know... try to  
curb your jealousy.

She wraps her arms around him from behind and kisses his  
neck.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Have a good day, baby.

LEONARD

Yeah. You too.

Christina leaves.

Leonard turns back to his glass blowing. His glass ball pops,  
deflates. Frustrated, he throws down his blowing pole.

4

INT. FALBO'S PIZZERIA - DAY

4

Leonard, now dressed in his pizzeria uniform wipes down a  
table.

MR. FALBO makes his way towards him. Leonard sees him, but  
tries to focus on the task at hand, swallow his pride.

MR. FALBO

Good morning, Leonard. How's my  
resident artist?

LEONARD

He's doing just great, Mr Falbo.

MR. FALBO

The next window display. I'm  
thinking a big Statue of Liberty  
eating a slice of pepperoni!

Leonard drops his shoulders. He looks at the current window  
display: a cartoon painting of the EMPIRE STATE BUILDING  
eating a slice of pizza.

LEONARD

We did the Statue of Liberty three  
months ago. What about something  
for the FDNY? There's that parade  
next month. Like a fire fighter.



MR. FALBO

And they're eating a slice of pepperoni?

LEONARD

A fire fighter eating a slice of pep. Got it. That's the perfect use of my talents.

MR. FALBO

(thrilled)

See? This is why it pays to have a genuine artist working here! We're lucky to have you.

Leonard forces a smile, as Mr Falbo heads off.

5

INT. HOME - BROOKLYN - AFTERNOON

5

Leo's parents' house. HARRY is seated on the couch next to Leonard.

The father astutely watches his son work on whatever is wrong with his laptop.

HARRY

I don't know why it keeps freezing. Thanks for sorting it, Leo son.

LEONARD

You'd only have ended up hitting it with a hammer.

HARRY

What are you doing now?

LEONARD

I'm clearing your cache before I reboot everything.

HARRY

Will I lose my games?

Leo's mom, BARB, joins the conversation from the kitchen where she prepares some refreshments.

BARB (O.S.)

Why do you still work at that pizza place anyway? You've been there for how long now?

LEONARD

Five years.

BARB (O.S.)

That's too long! You could have become a doctor in that amount of time.

LEONARD

Medical school takes like ten years.

BARB (O.S.)

If you had gone to medical school first, instead of wasting time with your paintings, and all these other jobs, ten years would have passed, and you'd be a doctor by now.

Leonard shakes his head.

LEONARD

You know I hate needles.

HARRY

(re: the computer)  
Now what are you doing?

LEONARD

I'm deleting the things you downloaded.

HARRY

I didn't download anything.

LEONARD

Oh yeah? Then how do you explain "Hot Singles in Your Area Dying to Meet You"?

Harry's eyes shift guiltily.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

And "Lonely Russian Babes"?

Barb peeks in, overhearing. Harry shoots her an awkward smile.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

What would mom think about HotRussianBabes.com, hmmm? Should I ask her?

HARRY

No no, let's keep this between us fellas.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

Just...clean it up for me would ya?  
Pop taught you about computers.

LEONARD

I know grandpa taught me lots of  
things. But he definitely didn't  
teach me how HotRussianBabes works.

Barb raises an eyebrow from the hallway, clearing her throat loudly. Harry gulps.

Barb enters the room. She has a tray of pizza and lemonade.

She sets it on the coffee table in front of Leo and Harry.

BARB

I swear he can't put the darn  
computer down. He has it with him  
at breakfast, doing yard work, in  
the bathroom.

Leonard glances at Harry.

LEONARD

Maybe play a few less games in  
future dad. You don't want to go  
blind.

Harry takes his computer from Leonard and sets it aside.

BARB

So how is the painting... hobby  
thing... going?

LEONARD

Oh, it's no hobby mom. The  
Metropolitan Museum keeps calling  
me, begging me to ditch you  
peasants and move my studio in. But  
I said family comes first!

Barb rolls her eyes.

BARB

Have you made any money yet?

LEONARD

Well I did sell my last masterpiece  
for \$10 million. But then I spent  
it all on brushes and ramen  
noodles.

BARB

Ah, so no real career or income then. You can still go to a real medical school?

Leonard throws his hands up.

LEONARD

This IS a real career! Haven't you seen my paintings? I'm like van Gogh, but with two ears!

HARRY

You could showcase your art right here! We'll invite the neighbors - even Chad Halvorsen!

LEONARD

Chad Halvorsen? Is he the musclebound dude always crushing cars in the junkyard?

HARRY

He loves monster trucks--

BARB

--And he loves art. He bought a lovely paint-by-numbers set just last week.

Leonard picks up his jacket exasperated.

BARB (CONT'D)

Now where are you going??

LEONARD

Nowhere, mom. Apparently, I'm going nowhere. Thanks for the support.

Leonard picks up his jacket, and leaves.

HARRY

Is it about monster trucks?

6

EXT. SOHO BUILDING - DAY

6

Traffic rumbles around them as Leo walks into a wide alley between two buildings, heading for a back lot.

Christina catches up to him, gives him a kiss on the cheek.

CHRISTINA

Sorry I'm late.

LEONARD  
Thought you weren't coming.

CHRISTINA  
How are your folks?

LEONARD  
As disappointed in me as ever.

CHRISTINA  
I'm sorry. So, what is this one?

LEONARD  
Jason said it's super indie.  
Apparently, to get in we have to  
prove that we aren't "mainstream".

CHRISTINA  
What does that mean?

LEONARD  
No idea. He just said, "Don't be  
mainstream". Maybe I should take  
off my pants and put them on my  
head. I dunno.

They enter a back parking area and approach a closed garage door.

A SMALL CROWD of quirky hipsters, each sporting their own individual identity and style, linger outside. Some of them puff on vapes. Others chatter self-importantly.

Leo's heart sinks.

LEONARD (CONT'D)  
(bitterly)  
Hipsters. God, how I hate hipsters.

CHRISTINA  
Just think how much they must hate  
themselves.

He and Christina approach the bouncer, who looks down his nose at them.

LEONARD  
We're here for the exhibit.

The Bouncer looks at them, scanning them.

LEONARD (CONT'D)  
I'm not wearing underwear.

The Bouncer considers this, then unhooks the velvet rope, and grants them access.

7 INT. ART DUNGEON - DAY 7

Leonard and Christina head down a dark, empty, HALLWAY.

At the end of the hallway they enter --

8 INT. THE EXHIBIT 8

Loud emo music and questionable art is displayed all over the room.

It is a wild, sensory overload.

All around them, HIPSTERS stare at art work and nod their approval.

PERFORMANCE ARTISTS in the corners writhe and gesticulate on the floor.

Leonard and Christina stare at a painting; slimy, with crayons melted to the canvas. Christina grimaces.

CHRISTINA

Is that... that's snot, isn't it?

Leonard leans in to inspect the painting.

LEONARD

(intrigued)

Hmm, you know this gives me an idea.

Christina gives Leonard a wary look.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Now if I could just ramp it up a notch...really get the mucus flowing...

Leonard pretends to pick his nose while Christina looks mortified.

CHRISTINA

Don't you dare flick one of your boogers on there! That's disgusting!

LEONARD

What? It needs more texture! Here,  
I need your opinion...

Leonard holds out his finger as if he has a booger on it.  
Christina SHRIEKS and jumps back.

CHRISTINA

Leonard Geller don't you come near  
me with that! People are staring!

Leonard bursts out laughing while Christina tries containing  
her own giggles. She play-slaps his arm.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

You're lucky I love you, you freak!  
Now let's get away from this snot  
painting!

They come to two arm chairs facing a TOILET with a PLUNGER in  
it.

Leo stops short looking at it, shakes his head. He peers in  
the bowl.

LEONARD

Of course there's real piss in it.

He grows frustrated as he gazes at the art.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

I gotta get out of here. I can't  
compete with bodily fluids.

CHRISTINA

What about the dealer?

LEONARD

Anyone who deals in this filth  
isn't someone I want to anything to  
do with. I'm done, Christina.

CHRISTINA

Leonard --

LEONARD

I need to get to work, so we can at  
least keep the lights on.

He heads for the exit. Christina watches him go, sad for him.

9 INT. SKINNY MINNIE'S DRAG CLUB - NIGHT 9

Minnie's is a fabulous drag club filled to the brim with young, sexy, stylish patrons of all walks of life.

Music thumps. Lights flash.

On the stage, DRAG QUEENS strut their stuff. The CROWD cheers and dances.

10 INT. SKINNY MINNIE'S DRAG CLUB - BAR - NIGHT 10

Leonard, in a stylish shirt, tends the bar. He serves a CUSTOMER

- who puts a few coins in the TIP JAR.

Leonard thanks them, then checks the size of the paltry tip, and sighs.

He looks around - everyone is having more fun than him.

Leonard turns

- and one of the other servers walks into him, spilling drinks all over him.

He sags; of course. Typical. Just his luck.

11 INT. LEONARD'S STUDIO - NIGHT 11

It's late. Christina sits by the window. Scrutinizes her laptop.

Leonard walks in holding a box of PIZZA. He plops it on the kitchen table.

LEONARD  
You're still awake.

CHRISTINA  
I might have some good news.

LEONARD  
That doesn't sound like us.

CHRISTINA  
I've compiled data on the most recent high-end art purchases.

LEONARD  
Congratulations?



Leonard lays face down on the couch.

CHRISTINA

Listen to me. Art isn't about talent. At least, not only about talent.

LEONARD

That's fortunate, because apparently I don't have any talent.

Then:

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Maybe I should open a window painting business. Car dealerships, furniture stores, fast food. If you want a cartoon object eating a pizza - I'm your guy!

CHRISTINA

Every major artist has a team. Publicists. Marketing. If we follow the playbook, then you can have dealers lining up out the door.

Leonard finally turns his head to her.

LEONARD

We don't have a team, Christina.

CHRISTINA

Yet. I'm saying the art world was built on stunts.

Christina holds up her computer.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

I've been looking up people who can create a stir about your work, turn you into a rising star of the Manhattan art scene.

Christina is too excited. She gets up and paces.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Someone who can get you trending on the socials. We just need to build the hype, and - boom! Leonard Geller is the hottest artist in New York!

Leonard looks at the computer.

LEONARD

Isn't that a bit gimmicky?

CHRISTINA

It's just marketing. If you don't play the game, how are you going to win? There has to be some way to get eyes on you.

Leonard sits up. He rubs his chin thoughtfully.

LEONARD

I don't know. I want my art to stand on its own merits, not through cheap publicity.

CHRISTINA

Piss and boogers, Leo! You have masterpieces all over this studio, and people need to see them!

Leonard looks around at his art, thinks on it.

LEONARD

How expensive is it going to be?

CHRISTINA

I've thought of that. Done some digging, and found some old hands who might be willing to help.

Christina takes his face in her hands.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

The world deserves to know your work.

Leonard nods, concedes.

LEONARD

I'm lucky to have you.

12

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM - DAY

12

Christina leads Leonard, carrying his portfolio, down the sidewalk in a very Spanish and Puerto Rican neighborhood.

There are people walking up and down the street, shops with vibrant signs, street vendors shouting and taxis beeping.

Leonard is nervous, but Christina is alive with excitement.

LEONARD

What's his name again? De la Cruz?

CHRISTINA

De la Vega. He's the guy who made Elliot Bloom's career.

LEONARD

Who the hell is Elliot Bloom?

CHRISTINA

I dunno. I thought you'd have heard of him.

LEONARD

How old is this guy?

CHRISTINA

In his sixties? Seventies?

LEONARD

He won't know a hashtag from a hash brown.

A Dominican WOMAN sitting in front of a FORTUNE TELLER SHOP reaches out to Leonard.

FORTUNE TELLER

Can I read your palms? You have the most beautiful energy. I can see your aura. I see fame and glory in your future!

LEONARD

Yeah? How about money - will I be rich?

She squints harder.

FORTUNE TELLER

I see...cup noodles. Many, many cup noodles.

Leonard frowns. Christina cracks up.

CHRISTINA

She's good!

He hurries to stay in step with Christina as they enter --

All around them are New York chachkies - gaudy accessories, keychains, t-shirts, and figurines are on display.

LEONARD

What sort of art expert are we meeting exactly? This is a tourist shop.

CHRISTINA

Trust me.

Christina steps to the counter where a TEEN CLERK is lazily scrolling through her phone.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Hi, I'm here to see Esteban de la Vega?

The CLERK shrugs and points to the back, without looking up from her phone.

CLERK

Back there.

CHRISTINA

Thanks.

They pass through a beaded curtain and enter --

14

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

14

A dingy hallway, cramped with boxes of stock. Leonard covers his nose.

LEONARD

What is that smell? Smells like a dead raccoon. I swear, if I end up murdered, I'll never let you forget it.

They approach the door at the end and knock quietly. There is a series of shuffles and something dropping on the floor.

ESTEBAN (O.S.)

Who's that? What do you want from me?

CHRISTINA

Esteban De le Vega?

The DOOR opens a crack. Beyond it, they can see a dark room with some BLACK LIGHTS.

ESTEBAN

No, I am Esteban De le Vega.

In the cracked doorway stands ESTEBAN, (50's), a regal, silver-fox Spaniard who has aged to perfection.

The man pops his head out and eyes Christina up and down suspiciously.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

Who are you?

CHRISTINA

I'd like you to meet Leonard Geller.

ESTEBAN

Is that supposed to mean something to me?

CHRISTINA

I'm an artist.

ESTEBAN

Never heard of you.

CHRISTINA

Not yet. Leonard is a rising talent in the New York scene. We'd like your help in taking him to the next level.

ESTEBAN

(eyeing Leo)

And what makes you think I could possibly assist with such an endeavor? What makes you think I would even want to?

CHRISTINA

You were one of the top art dealers in Manhattan in the eighties.

ESTEBAN

That was... a long time ago.

CHRISTINA

You know what people want, but even more, you know what people want to be told that they want. I'm told you're the best.

Esteban is flattered, if not still suspicious. He steps out of his room and closes the door behind him.

ESTEBAN  
She do most of the talking?

LEONARD  
Yeah. I'm just the artist.

ESTEBAN  
Smart.

He stares at Leonard for a moment, his expression unreadable.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)  
Let me see your portfolio.

Leonard lifts his portfolio up. It awkward moving in the tight hallway.

LEONARD  
Do you want to maybe go in your office?

ESTEBAN  
No. This is fine out here.

LEONARD  
It's just that the corridor smells funny, and --

ESTEBAN  
-- Give it to me.

Esteban takes the large folder and opens it.

Leonard and Christina watch Esteban uncomfortably as he flips through the large pages of the portfolio.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)  
Hmm, good...very good...great...genius...pure brilliance...

Leonard beams under the praise while Christina looks hopeful.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)  
Average...meh...is this a child's finger painting...a napkin doodle...?

Leonard's smile drops. Esteban closes the portfolio with a SNAP.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)  
Well you certainly know how to handle a brush.  
(MORE)

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

Whether there's talent under all  
that paint is debatable.

LEONARD

So that means you'll help launch my  
career?

ESTEBAN

Ah no, I don't waste time on  
charity cases. But do keep smearing  
colors together. I find it oddly  
therapeutic.

He heads back into his office and shuts the door, leaving the  
couple gaping in dismay.

CHRISTINA

(calls after him)

Was that a yes or a no?? Ugh, that  
geezer...

The door opens again, abruptly.

ESTEBAN

I have seen it all before. I want  
to be surprised. This --

He wafts a hand at the portfolio.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

It lacks the secret ingredient. I  
cannot work with this.

He goes back in and slams his door.

ESTEBAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I'm retired!

Christina and Leonard look puzzled.

LEONARD

Total waste of time.

Christina looks at the office door. She considers knocking  
but decides not to. They are undeterred.

CHRISTINA

Okay, Plan B.

As they vanish, the office door cracks open, and Esteban's  
eye peeks through.

15 INT. ART GALLERY - QUEENS - DAY

15

At the small curator's podium, a man sleeps - SAM WOLF (late-50's), a stubble faced, tired guy with a rumpled suit.

Christina and Leonard stare at him as he snores loudly.

LEONARD

Excuse me?

SAM

(snorting awake)

Huh? Sorry. Gallery hours 10-3.

CHRISTINA

It's 1pm.

Sam looks up at the unfamiliar pair; he has a candy wrapper stuck to his face.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Sam Wolf?

SAM

Do I owe you money?

CHRISTINA

You're Sam Wolf the PR veteran?  
Former Lehman bros employee? Got  
screwed by the financial collapse?

Sam rubs his eyes and looks up at them.

SAM

Maybe. Maybe not. Who wants to  
know?

CHRISTINA

Mr. Wolf, we have an offer for you.

SAM

Prices are as marked, young lady.  
I'm afraid I can't haggle. As I  
said, these are authentic.

CHRISTINA

We're not looking to buy a  
painting...

SAM

Okay, I can go a hundred lower, but  
I can't go lower than that. Final  
offer, take it or leave it.



Then:

SAM (CONT'D)  
Any piece you want. Take your pick.

CHRISTINA  
Mr. Wolf, we want to talk to you  
about a job offer that could be  
very lucrative.

Now he's interested.

SAM  
I'm listening...

16 EXT. ART GALLERY - QUEENS 16

A van pulls up with a design of a wizard and dragon on the side similar to a Frank Frazetta "Conan the Barbarian" piece.

Esteban rolls down the window and looks into the gallery at Christina and Leonard; he has been following them.

17 INT. ART GALLERY - QUEENS 17

Christina continues the hard sell to Sam.

CHRISTINA  
You were a public relations manager  
for the top art dealers in the  
country. We need you to do that  
again.

SAM  
No way. I gave all that up. I sell  
art now. Genuine George Dawns.

Leonard looks at another piece more closely and frowns.

LEONARD  
Wait, isn't this the piece hanging  
in Chicago?

SAM  
Obviously the one in Chicago is a  
print. This is the original.

Christina and Leonard frown. Then:

CHRISTINA

We need you to work your magic. We want you to be Leonard's Public Relations manager.

SAM

I don't even know you.

LEONARD

I'm an artist.

SAM

And?

CHRISTINA

We believe that only you can make Leonard the most sought after artist in the city.

Leonard points to another painting.

LEONARD

And isn't this one in the Los Angeles Art Museum?

Sam rushes over, waving his arms, defensively.

SAM

Prints! They're all prints! THESE ones are the originals!

CHRISTINA

If you can help us pull this off, we'll cut you in on the back-end of whatever Leonard makes. We can negotiate percentage.

SAM

(hearing Christina)  
How big a percentage?

Leonard looks closely at one of the paintings and realizes that they are the prints.

LEONARD

These are all prints! They're just printed on card stock and painted over with clear coat. You didn't even print them on canvas.

CHRISTINA

Mr. Wolf, we need your skills.

LEONARD

He's a fraud!

CHRISTINA

And I think you need Leonard.

DING DING - The three turn to the door. GEORGE DAWN is standing there; 50s, flamboyant, arrogant and melodramatic.

Leonard and Sam freeze - Leonard surprised, Sam instantly afraid. Just outside, Esteban's VAN is parked.

Leonard nudges Christina, aside:

LEONARD

Oh hell. That's George Dawn.

Sam's face drops.

SAM

Shit.

Esteban scrambles out of his van and walks in behind Dawn wearing a hat, scarf, and sunglasses.

DAWN

Hello, Samuel. I have been looking forward to -

Esteban breezes right past Dawn bumping his shoulder lightly and cutting off his speech.

They all watch the strange disrupter walk to the back wall of the gallery and begin to stare intently at a painting.

Dawn clears his throat drawing everyone's attention back to him and begins again.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Hello, Samuel.

SAM

Samuel? Who is this Samuel you speak of? I am... John.

DAWN

I have been meaning to stop by. Your gallery is just as pathetic as I had imagined. Oh, how the mighty have fallen.

Dawn begins walking around the room, arms behind his back.

DAWN (CONT'D)

I almost hate to shut you down and sue you for defamation. This place must be worthless. And I doubt you have more than the suit on your back and shoes on your feet.

He pauses for dramatic effect... then laughs, dramatically.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Oh, who am I kidding? I love that I can crush you, and there's nothing you can do to stop me.

SAM

I have every right to sell these prints!

LEONARD

What did I say? Prints. See?

SAM

So you can just get the hell out of my gallery before I sue YOU for - for - for being an asshole! I doubt you're even the real George Dawn.

DAWN

Ironic.

Dawn holds up a finger and reaches into his jacket.

He takes out a piece of paper and unfolds it dramatically.

Leonard and Christina exchange a look. They have no idea what they're mixed up with here.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Oh! What do we have here?

He walks over to Sam and slaps the document into his chest.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Some light reading.

Dawn turns and looks at Leonard. Sees his portfolio.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Are you an artist? Your face is familiar.

Leonard is a little star-struck and nods.

LEONARD  
Uh... yeah... big fan.

Dawn smiles kindly, that façade from earlier returning.

DAWN  
That's very kind of you.

LEONARD  
Yeah. That's me. All heart.

Dawn snatches Leonard's portfolio out of his hand.

DAWN  
May I...?

LEONARD  
Be my guest.

The famous painter smiles and opens the portfolio - thumbs through it. He raises his eyebrows.

DAWN  
These speak to me. Though what language they speak in is in some dreadful foreign tongue.

Dawn hands back the portfolio.

DAWN (CONT'D)  
Ghastly.

Leonard is offended, seethes.

CHRISTINA  
We've been looking for someone to take notice of Leo's work.

DAWN  
Perhaps you would consider working for me?

CHRISTINA  
You mean an exhibit?

DAWN  
I mean sell his artwork under my name and guidance, and in return I'll offer a steady income.

LEONARD  
Put your name to my work? I don't think so.

DAWN

Financial stability is hard to come by in art. Just ask Samuel. He lives in his car.

SAM

It's a hatchback. Loads of space.

LEONARD

I'm not in it for the money.

Esteban can't hold it in any longer. He SPINS around and yanks off his crude disguise.

ESTEBAN

Thief!

They all look at the weird old man.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

Don't listen to him, boy! This man will steal your work! Claim it as his own! Sell it for a huge profit, and toss you aside.

Dawns laughs. Leonard and Christina are caught in the middle of this bizarre scene.

DAWN

Esteban! Oh, it is good to see you! This is a glorious reunion we're having. Samuel, are you seeing this? It's like the old days.

Sam is still trying to make sense of the document Dawn shoved at him.

Dawn looks at Esteban like he's no more than a bag of dog shit.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Still driving around in your funny van, and selling those fuzzy black light posters?

ESTEBAN

At least they're MINE!

Dawn turns and slips a business card into Leonard's pocket.

DAWN

Call me if you change your mind.

He gives his old friends one final look and strolls confidently from the gallery - DING DING.

LEONARD

What a dick.

Sam finally looks up, prompted by the DING. He sees Esteban for the first time.

SAM

What are you doing here?

ESTEBAN

I was going to make sure these two didn't recruit you. My lad, your work lingered on my tongue, like the aftertaste of an ice cream sundae --

Leonard, is flattered, his passion returning.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

-- Or a lover's kiss.

Leonard pulls a face at the thought.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

And then I see George Dawn walking through the door...

Sam puts away the letter from Dawn, throws his arm around Leonard suddenly.

SAM

Whatever you need, I'm in. For a generous percentage, and the satisfaction of putting George Dawn in his place.

CHRISTINA

Hold on a second --

ESTEBAN

They don't need you, Wolf! They need MY expertise.

Leonard is caught between the two men. Then:

LEONARD

What if we all worked together?

ESTEBAN

I could be persuaded to do that.

Christina pulls Leonard aside.

CHRISTINA  
Whatever's going on here, we don't  
want to get caught up in it.

LEONARD  
Who cares about their motivation?  
They want to help me.

CHRISTINA  
Because they've got a vendetta  
against George Dawn.

LEONARD  
It was your idea that we come to  
them, Christina.

CHRISTINA  
That was before I knew they were  
both insane.

LEONARD  
They're the best chance I have.

Reluctantly, Christina relents. Leonard turns to Sam and Esteban.

LEONARD (CONT'D)  
Gentlemen, what do you say?

Sam and Esteban look at one another, and then turn back to Leonard, and smile.

Christina isn't sure what they're getting into.

18 INT. DINER - DAY

18

Leonard, Christina, Esteban, and Sam sit at a booth, as a  
WAITRESS TAKES THEIR ORDER

Christina sits with her laptop out.

Esteban preps himself.

Sam looks over the menu for the cheapest options.

SAM  
Couldn't we have found somewhere  
cheaper to eat? Esteban, can you --

ESTEBAN  
You can pay for your own meal.



Sam turns to the Waitress.

SAM

I'll have a kids chicken tenders meal. Hold the chicken. And... a table water.

The Waitress raises an eyebrow, nods, and walks off.

ESTEBAN

I promise to use every trick in the book to make you the first name in art, Leonard. We shall relegate Dawn to the gutter!

CHRISTINA

Why do you hate him so much?

ESTEBAN

He stole my artists' work years ago, that snake! Sold it as his own. The leopard cannot change his stripes!

CHRISTINA

...you mean a leopard doesn't change his SPOTS.

Esteban waves his hand.

ESTEBAN

Si si, spots, stripes - this is not about fashion, dear! The point is, Dawn is evil incarnate!

Leonard taps the table.

LEONARD

Christina already set up a Facebook group, Twitter account, Instagram, and a Snap Chat.

CHRISTINA

They're ready to go live, once we have our game plan. Which, I stress, we've yet to agree upon.

LEONARD

Take down George Dawn. Make me as famous as I deserve. Prove my family wrong. What more do we need?

CHRISTINA

(aside)

I just want to make sure we're on the same page here, and it doesn't get too personal. We don't want to be stuck in the middle of some war against the biggest artist in the City.

LEONARD

This is personal to me too. It's sharks like George Dawn that stop the rest of us getting a foothold.

CHRISTINA

We don't want him coming after us too.

ESTEBAN

Ah, you see, the beauty is if we follow my plan, people will believe you already have a foothold.

LEONARD

But I don't. I'm a nobody.

ESTEBAN

The Emperor's New Clothes, my boy. What you tell them is what they believe. We'll say you're already a big name - too big for the likes of George Dawn to tackle - and they'll believe you are.

CHRISTINA

So you're going to lie?

ESTEBAN

Leave the ethics to me, young lady.

CHRISTINA

Yeah, that's really patronizing. And I dunno if you remember, but that story didn't end well for The Emperor.

SAM

Neither did Return of the Jedi.

CHRISTINA

What's your point?

SAM

Just proving that I'm paying attention.

CHRISTINA

I dunno. This all sounds kind of deceitful. Have you even considered a digital strategy?

SAM

A what?

CHRISTINA

Social media. You know? Online presence. Get Leonard trending. Build up slowly.

Sam and Esteban look at her blankly. Christina sighs.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

I'll handle the digital strategy.

ESTEBAN

Slow doesn't win races. We go big out of the gate, or we go nowhere. No time for your techno-gibberish.

Sam is focused on the menu.

SAM

Do you think they'll give me the toy?

LEONARD

What?

SAM

The toy that comes with the kids meal.

Esteban rolls his eyes.

SAM (CONT'D)

It says here that every kids meal comes with a toy.

Sam points to something on the menu.

SAM (CONT'D)

Oh, no, right here. 12 and under. No toy for me then.

He slams the menu shut.

CHRISTINA

(desperate)

Is there anyone else who might be able to help us? Someone a bit younger and more honest, maybe?

ESTEBAN

I can cash in a few favors. Most of them should still be alive. Elliott Bronk is only 67.

Christina sags; this isn't going to work.

LEONARD

And you definitely think your way will get my name out there, right? And this isn't just about getting back at George Dawn?

ESTEBAN

Of course. Yes, yes. That's why we're doing it. For the right reasons.

SAM

It doesn't seem right.

CHRISTINA

What doesn't?

SAM

What if some poor kid has just turned 13?

The other three groan.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'm just saying, kids age at different rates. My balls didn't drop until I was 18.

Leo glances at Christina; even he's starting to get concerned.

ESTEBAN

Leo, we want this for you as much as we want it for ourselves. I promise. Right, Sam?

Esteban elbows Sam.

SAM

Hm? What? Oh, yeah. Kid, we're gonna make you a household name.

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

I'm not even thinking about that  
bastard George Dawn yadda yadda.

Leonard and Christina look at each of them and nods. They're nervous, but the train is moving now.

ESTEBAN

Let the show begin!

19

EXT. NEW YORK - DAY

19

**MONTAGE**

- Sam and Esteban scouting locations; warehouses, empty retail outlets, lofts.
- Christina builds a website; focusing on making Leonard appear mysterious and enigmatic.
- Leonard works on his art.
- Sam RAIDS the dumpsters and trash bins of a wedding and gallery exhibits for WINE BOTTLES.
- Esteban collecting a number of fliers from a print store, advertising THE WORLD OF LEONARD GELLER.
- Leonard producing piece after piece; sculptures, paintings, blown glass...
- In the street Esteban points at certain cars and certain store fronts for Sam to put the fliers
- they bicker as they do so.
- Christina sending a tweet with the hashtag "WhoIsLeonardGeller?"

**END MONTAGE**

20

INT. LEONARD'S STUDIO - DAY

20

As Leonard works, Christina sends e-vite after e-vite on Facebook and email.

Sam watches over her shoulder.

CHRISTINA

These e-vites will even tell us  
when they've been opened.

SAM  
Modern technology is lost on me.  
Even my phone is a decade old.

Sam holds up his phone.

CHRISTINA  
Sam, you do realize that's a  
calculator?

And it is. Sam looks at it. Then:

SAM  
Well, that explains everything.

He turns back to the computer screen.

CHRISTINA  
These will go out to everyone on  
our list. The great and the good of  
the Manhattan scene.

SAM  
So it just sends invites all on its  
own? No licking envelopes or  
anything?

Christina eyes him warily.

CHRISTINA  
You can lick the screen if you  
really want...

Sam considers it. Christina's eyes widen.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)  
I was joking - do NOT lick the  
screen!

SAM  
I wasn't going to! What do you take  
me for?

He licks his lips without thinking. Christina points sternly.

CHRISTINA  
Don't even THINK about licking that  
screen, Sam!

SAM  
I would never do that.

Sam inadvertently licks his lips, again. Christina sighs.

21 EXT. A BASEMENT GALLERY - DAY

21

Esteban tours a location; it has seen better days.

The LOCATION MANAGER at his side.

ESTEBAN

Stand right here and stretch your  
arms out.

Esteban walks to her other side and stretches his arm to hers.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

Now, come to my side...

They shuffle back and forth across the room. Esteban shakes his head. The place is not good enough.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

Too small damn you! Big! We need to  
go big!

He swans out, leaving the Location Manager baffled.

22 INT. COMMUNITY THEATER - DAY

22

Sam, Christina, and Leonard are seated in an audience of a Community Theater production of Shakespeare.

The actors are quite over the top. They are --

-- HAMLET (30's), a very dramatic guy, always "on".

-- OPHELIA (30's), clinging to her youth as desperately as she can.

-- HORATIO (40's), a weary never-made-it actor, though a nice man.

HAMLET

A goodly jest! For who should pilot  
such a ship -- shouldst thou?

HORATIO

Thou knave, I could indeed! A pilot  
skill'd am I in my own right. Now  
should we stay, and be abused more  
by this man's words?

OPHELIA

Two thousand can we render to thee  
now, and fifteen more deliver when  
we come with safety unto Alderaan's  
bright port.

Leonard watches, aghast; it's a terrible, hammy, performance.

23

INT. THE LOBBY - LATER

23

Sam is shaking hands with three actors from the show.

The three actors are being recruited.

SAM (V.O.)

We want to make the exhibit feel  
like it's hard to get into. We'll  
hire actors to talk about how  
incredible the artwork is.

HAMLET

(over dramatic)

Your art is amazing! Simply  
amazing! It blo-o-ows me awaaay!

He grasps Leonard into a passionate embrace.

A bewildered Leo pats his back while Christina stifles a  
laugh.

Hamlet gives Same a big, theatrical, wink. Sam returns it  
with a thumbs up.

24

INT. NEW YORK TIMES BULLPEN - DAY

24

Christina, dressed as a COURIER, stands beside the desk of  
CHAD MITTON (40's).

He's reporter for the New York Times Arts & Entertainment  
section.

ESTEBAN (V.O.)

And we are going to invite a few  
special guests, like that  
entertainment editor from the  
Times. None of your e-vite  
nonsense. We want to make an  
impression with them.

Chad is signing for a gold-leafed envelope.

He opens it to find the fancy invitation to:



THE WORLD OF LEONARD GELLER - INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBIT -  
WORLD PREMIERE SHOWCASE.

25 INT. LEONARD'S STUDIO - NIGHT 25

Leonard steps back from another piece. He's spattered in paint.

He is SURROUNDED by work - glass sculptures, large paintings, inventive collages, a floor covered in drop cloth and paint.

He grins, proud and excited.

26 INT. DINER - NIGHT 26

In the booth as before, the conversation still in progress.

ESTEBAN

The key is to make them wait to enter the exhibit. The longer they wait, the more intrigued they'll become.

SAM

And with the positive reinforcement from our plants --

LEONARD

-- People will want to see what I can do.

SAM

All aboard the hype train. Choo choo!

ESTEBAN

Be prepared for a quiet opening, but such a strategy is sure to bring in big buyers by the second and third night.

SAM

And then, everyone will want a Leonard Geller original!

LEONARD

Well about damn time.

He smiles at Christina, satisfied; she still has reservations, but she's coming around.

ESTEBAN

We're a pair of old pros. You  
should never have doubted us.

Leonard grins and raises his WATER.

LEONARD

To the future.

They all clink glasses in a toast. Leonard is excited - and so is Christina, but she wrestles with her fear that something is going to go wrong.

27

INT. DAWN'S APARTMENT - DAY

27

A minimalist, penthouse apartment adorned with art, looking out over the city.

Dawn stands at the floor-to-ceiling window, glancing at his phone, concerned.

An ASSISTANT enters, comes over.

ASSISTANT

Sir, you wanted to see me?

DAWN

Who is Leonard Geller?

ASSISTANT

Don't know, Mr Dawn.

DAWN

He's everywhere suddenly. Some big showcase he's putting on. Apparently he's a big name, so why haven't I heard of him?

Dawn looks up from his phone.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Find out everything you can about him. Find out who he is, what he's up to.

28

INT. GIFT SHOP - AFTERNOON

28

Leonard strolls in and waves to the Clerk before heading to the back room and into --

29

INT. ESTEBAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

29

Leonard walks into the cramped back room, knocks on the door as he does so.

Esteban has a desk, a single chair, a filing cabinet, and a rusted lamp. There are boxes of stock everywhere.

ESTEBAN

My boy, my boy - come in! Oh, you already have.

Leonard recoils at the smell, covers his nose.

Leonard notices Estaban has a couch with a fold-out bed in the corner. He clearly lives here. It's pretty pathetic.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

Pay no heed. It's for... family when they visit. I have many young nephews in need of a bed.

Then, changing the subject;

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

How flows your creative juices?

LEONARD

I can't stop. It's like it's pouring out of me. The thought that people are actually going to see my work finally --

Leonard sets his portfolio down on the desk, unzips it.

ESTEBAN

This your first wave for the collection?

LEONARD

These are just works-in-progress. There's still more to do.

Esteban puts on his glasses, starts thumbing through the portfolio. He nods.

ESTEBAN

You've been trying some new things, haven't you?

The art is darker, weirder, and more shocking than we've seen from Leonard; body parts and bodily functions.

LEONARD

People seem to want to be shocked.  
I thought this would make them take  
more notice of me.

ESTEBAN

They are already noticing, thanks  
to the work of Sam and your lady  
friend. You are already the name on  
all the lips.

Then:

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

But you must stay true to yourself.  
Even the fake can smell  
inauthenticity.

Leonard shrugs. He gets it. He hesitates.

LEONARD

That doesn't seem to have affected  
George Dawn's career.

Esteban scoffs at the mention of Dawn, and then he's off on a  
rant.

ESTEBAN

George Dawn succeeds because he is  
a liar, and his art itself is a  
lie.

Esteban smooths his hair, tries to calm down.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

But you, my dear Leonard, are not  
George Dawn.

Leo nods.

LEONARD

Okay. Well, I guess I'll keep  
working. Get these finished.

Esteban touches the portfolio.

ESTEBAN

No, my boy. These are indeed  
wonderful as they are.

LEONARD

But -- but I need more time.

ESTEBAN

Ah, a true artist. The work is never finished.

LEONARD

If you're sure...

ESTEBAN

Perhaps you can push the next wave even further into the grotesque and bombastic. Make them remember it.

Esteban puts a hand on Leonard's shoulder.

Then Esteban picks up his coat.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

Come! There is something I want you all to see.

30 EXT. GIFT SHOP - DAY

30

Leonard and Esteban leave the shop, and head off down the street

- unaware that they're being watched by George Dawn's ASSISTANT.

31 INT. CHURCH - DAY

31

Leonard stands in the middle of an emptied out old church with Sam and Christina. The old church is dusty, but it is very much ostentatious and ridiculously pretentious.

Esteban stands at the door with his sunglasses and scarf very much aloof.

LEONARD

Esteban, this place is perfect.

ESTEBAN

Yes, it is.

Sam slaps Esteban on the back, a little too hard.

SAM

You've still got it, old pal.

ESTEBAN

Yes, I do.

Esteban whirls around the room, sketching out his vision.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

We shall transport the visitors via the main doors, through a tunnel of blinding light. They shall feel like stepping through a portal into another realm - into a forest of ideas and concepts. The physical manifestation of one man's mind.

Leonard nods, smiles, awed.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

And there, above the pulpit, Leonard himself, nailed to a crucifix.

Leonard reacts, shocked.

LEONARD

I'm sorry?

CHRISTINA

You don't think it's a bit much?

They all look at her.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Kind of a pretentious vibe, no?

LEONARD

You're killing the mood, Christina.

CHRISTINA

I'm just saying, isn't this the opposite of what you've always stood for? You hate all that art world pretentiousness.

LEONARD

Why are you being so negative?

CHRISTINA

Because I care about you. First we're lying to get people in here, now this?

ESTEBAN

To be in the art world, you must become one with the art world.

CHRISTINA

See? That's what I'm talking about - what does that even mean?

Leonard doesn't have a good answer.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

I just want this to be about you.  
Who you really are.

LEONARD

It is about me. Esteban says the  
lies stop at the door. Right,  
Esteban.

ESTEBAN

Right! Don't you agree, Samuel?

SAM

Yeah, yeah, whatever.

Sam is distracted by the FOOD DRIVE bin near the front door,  
casually picking through the items, as the others talk.

ESTEBAN

Soon, all of Manhattan will be  
worshipping at the feet of Leonard  
Michael Geller!

Leonard grins.

LEONARD

Actually, my middle name isn't  
Michael, but yep. Yup. That sounds  
good to me.

He turns to Christina.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

This is what you wanted for me  
isn't it? It's why you started this  
ball rolling.

CHRISTINA

If you're happy, I'm happy.

LEONARD

And it'll benefit us both in the  
long run. Give us the lifestyle we  
deserve.

Christina holds up her phone.

CHRISTINA

Well, I can't pretend we're not  
getting a lot of traffic on the  
website.

(MORE)

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Sam's traditional methods, and my data crunching, has been a good mix.

She holds the phone to Leo.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

There's even a new sub-Reddit trying to dissect the cryptic messages.

LEONARD

So, I've gone viral?

ESTEBAN

And who doesn't love a good virus?

Christina looks at him, frowns.

Leonard looks around the room. He smiles, but he's still got butterflies.

LEONARD

So crazy. I can't believe this is actually happening.

Christina addresses Leonard, trying to hide her reservations. She speaks softly to him, sincere.

CHRISTINA

And if it doesn't work, we can just go back to the way things have been, and we will be happy.

LEONARD

Yeah. Happy.

CHRISTINA

Right?

LEONARD

Right.

ESTEBAN

There'll be no going back from this, Leonard. The future is a one-way street.

There's a clattering sound; they all look over at Sam, who dropped a bunch of food cans, as he was filling his pockets with them.

Leonard looks around the church again, hope filling him. He looks up at the crucifix on the wall, and nods.



LEONARD  
I am the Arty-Christ.

A smile is plastered across his face, but Christina remains worried.

32 EXT. THE CHURCH - NIGHT

32

A LONG LINE OF PEOPLE of all types stand at the front entrance of the church

It is an eclectic gathering of art lovers from all over the city and beyond; hipsters, the ultra-rich, foreign art dealers...

In the middle of the line a little further, HAMLET and OPHELIA are in a heated debate that's slightly too hammy and actorly.

HAMLET  
No, my dear, I will be purchasing at least three pieces tonight! Leo Gellers are the hottest thing in the art world right now.

OPHELIA  
Damn you! I don't know if I can afford one, but dammit all, I'll damn well buy one with whatever damn money I have, dammit!

In the crowd, George Dawn is disguised as a shy elderly man.

He keeps his head down, but assesses the patrons around him with a keen eye.

33 INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

33

Christina arranges catering on folding tables - bottled water fancied up with glacier labels, cheap boxed wine masquerading in crystal.

An iPod pumps choral techno through the church speakers, set to rave mode. Leonard, rushes in from a side entrance - still wearing his server's uniform from Falbo's.

There is no artwork displayed anywhere. He stops dead in his tracks. Esteban walks out from a BACK ROOM. He is dressed to the nines in a very outdated suit and ascot.

ESTEBAN  
My boy, where have you been?

LEONARD  
 Couldn't get away from Falbo's.  
 Where the hell is my art?

Esteban puts his arm around Leonard.

ESTEBAN  
 I had a dream last night, and  
 during that dream I envisioned a  
 new concept for the showcase.

LEONARD  
 One with no art?

ESTEBAN  
 An antechamber, to heighten  
 anticipation. This is a  
 psychological maneuver. Trust me.  
 It's an old trick.

LEONARD  
 I'm still being Jesus though,  
 right?

ESTEBAN  
 Ah. Not exactly. Samuel and I did a  
 little health and safety stress  
 test, and it turns out the crucifix  
 wasn't entire structurally sound.

Reveal the crucifix is broken, and Sam - dressed as a server,  
 similarly Christina - is wearing a neck brace, as he shuffles  
 in with a tray of store-bought, makeshift, hors d'oeuvres.

SAM  
 It looks worse than it is.

Leo reaches in for one, but Christina rushes over, and slaps  
 away his hand.

CHRISTINA  
 No eating. We can't afford to feed  
 you too.

LEONARD  
 What even are they?

He peers at the food.

CHRISTINA  
 Cheese puffs and creme fraiche.  
 It's all we had the money for.

LEONARD  
Has Esteban told you about this?

CHRISTINA  
He has.

LEONARD  
And you're okay with the lack of art?

CHRISTINA  
At this point, I'm leaving it to the experts. Tired of being the voice of doom.

LEONARD  
If you're okay with it, I'm okay.

CHRISTINA  
I just want you to be happy.

Esteban smiles, satisfied.

ESTEBAN  
Get ready, Leonard, and I shall explain everything. We are almost ready to welcome our guests.

Christina hands him a his suit, in a zip-up protector. Leonard swallows nervously.

34 INT. THE CHURCH - MINUTES LATER

34

Esteban opens the front doors in a flourish and declares to the crowd...

ESTEBAN  
The exhibit is now open!

There is applause from outside, whooping. Leonard - in his suit - can't see the crowd, but he hears it, and his eyes go wide. He instinctively looks over at Christina, who gives him a thumbs up.

Esteban leads a select few guests into the church, including CHAD MITTON, who is followed by HORATIO and OPHELIA; a trio of hipster art dealers.

Behind them is George Dawn, in his disguise.

GUEST 1  
I hear it's an emotional experience more than anything.

GUEST 2

I've actually already called in sick tomorrow from the office. I just don't know how much this will affect me.

GUEST 1

When I attended Edgar Truncheon's last showcase I couldn't walk for a week.

George Dawn glares, annoyed at the excitement in the room, as guests swarming around him.

HORATIO

(to Chad)

I almost got into Geller's Paris show last year. They reached capacity, and it was one night only.

CHAD

Such a rag.

Chad cocks an eyebrow and takes a glass of wine from Christina's tray.

GUEST 2

Where's the art though?

HORATIO

Perhaps the absence of art is the art. Silence can say so much.

OPHELIA

It's not the notes you play, but the space between them.

Nearby, Dawn overhears, and rolls his eyes.

The buzz continues as Esteban, Sam and Christina mingle with the people. Leonard looks on nervously, smiling, hopeful, but anonymous - amazed at the size of the crowd.

George Dawn looks up at him from amid the crowd, and narrows his eyes.

Esteban claps to get the attention of the gathered.

ESTEBAN

Would those of you in Group A please step this way?

People check their invites and e-vites; those in Group A step forwards

- and Esteban guides a group of people through the large church and the BACK ROOM.

Sam, in his neck brace, stands there as a doorman to the rear area, and only opens the door to the chosen few

- wincing in pain as he does so.

SAM

It looks worse than it is.

HORATIO

(to Ophelia and Chad)

What do you think the neck brace represents?

OPHELIA

Healing perhaps?

CHAD

Or the wounds we all display.

George shoves someone aside and manages to slip into the group.

Beyond the doorway, Leo catches a glimpse at the display they've created in the back.

What is in there, exactly?

35

INT. THE CHURCH - BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

35

The chosen few move around the small room, awed by what they're seeing.

It's Leo's work - and as Esteban encouraged, it's more extreme than his usual stuff, more akin to the work displayed at the earlier exhibits.

CHAD

(in tears)

Incredible.

HORATIO

Simply outstanding. Where is the dealer? I simply must have that red piece. What is it called?

OPHELIA  
 (in awe, reading a label)  
 "The Stocking Cap."

It is indeed a stocking cap, stretched over a red urinal.

OPHELIA (CONT'D)  
 And it's a damned masterpiece.

George looks at her, scoffs beneath his breath.

He looks her up and down, picks up on the minor details that give away the fact that her clothes are old or secondhand.

He smirks.

Leonard sneaks in, stands off to the side and watches the circus unfold.

Person after person enters the back room and exits with joy, tears, concentration, and wonder on their faces.

Many of the guests walk to Leonard and shake his hand or kiss him on the cheek. He is humble, overwhelmed by the affection.

LEONARD  
 Leonard Geller. Thank you for coming.

HORATIO  
 Simply wonderful work.

OPHELIA  
 (smiles broadly)  
 Tell me when they will be made available. I demand to have one.

LEONARD  
 We'll be taking bids tomorrow morning through Esteban de le Vega.

HORATIO  
 I hadn't realized he was still working.

Esteban comes over.

ESTEBAN  
 I work underground now. Not literally. I'm not a mole. Ha ha. I represent a list of only the most exclusive, next level, clients.

OPHELIA

Breathtaking stuff, Mr Geller.  
You're exactly what the art world  
needed.

HORATIO

So much more authentic than that  
hack George Dawn.

CHAD

He's yesterday's news. Let us never  
mention him again.

Esteban grins.

On Leonard, swelling with pride. Dawn has heard enough - he  
storms out, barging past Sam

- who cries out in pain.

36 EXT. THE STREETS - NIGHT

36

The crowd lined around the block eats it up. The more people  
talk about it, the more excited people get.

Hamlet and Ophelia are out on the sidewalk, projecting their  
praise so that everyone within earshot can hear them.

The line stretches further and further.

George Dawn leaves the church in a foul mood, and he pushes  
his way through the crowd.

37 INT. LEONARD'S STUDIO - DAY

37

The next day, Christina, Sam, Esteban, and Leonard look  
stunned, in the empty studio. Leonard is particularly  
shellshocked.

LEONARD

What is going on?!

SAM

You're a hit, Leonard - that's  
what's going on.

CHRISTINA

You sold every last piece.

SAM

One of them went for fifty thousand  
dollars.

Leonard shakes his head in disbelief.

ESTEBAN

I knew you would do it, my boy!

She leaps into his arms. They kiss.

SAM

We're all gonna be rich! Filthy.  
Stinking. Rich.

ESTEBAN

Oh, how I wish I could see the look  
on George Dawn's face right now.

SAM

Bet it's quite the picture.

Esteban and Sam high-five.

38

INT. GEORGE DAWN'S PENTHOUSE - DAY

38

Dawn slams the NEW YORK TIMES down on his desk. The headline reads:

BREAKOUT STAR OF ART WORLD - LEO GELLER.

Standing before Dawn are three of his MINIONS: an artist, SEAN CASEY, one of his finance guys, GREEN, and his publicist JILL.

DAWN

How could you let this happen? That headline should be about me.

JILL

Your show was weeks ago, George. I can't weave publicity out of thin air.

DAWN

Then what am I paying you for?

Dawn shoots Sean a hot look.

DAWN (CONT'D)

You! What's your name?

SEAN

Sean.



DAWN

Stupid name. Your work isn't up to snuff anymore. You're fired.

SEAN

But everything in your last show was done by me. We sold every last piece. The reviews were --

DAWN

And now we're being upstaged by this... Leonard Geller, whoever he is. They're saying online that my day is over. That I'm done. That I'm out of ideas.

He turns to Green.

DAWN (CONT'D)

How bad could this get for us?

GREEN

It's a limited market. Geller sold out, and he's hot right now, so I think we can expect to see a decline in sales of your work.

Leonard picks up a piece of art, and smashes it against the wall.

GREEN (CONT'D)

That was an original.

DAWN

Write it off as an expense. And then find some way to back this Geller into a corner, with nowhere else to turn.

JILL

What do you want us to do exactly?

DAWN

I don't care how you do it, I just want him signing over his entire collection before the ink dries on any deal he's made since last night.

JILL

I can contact your Manhattan dealers. We could seed whispers of his legitimacy.

GREEN

Run the campaign we did on Tifa Brown. That was very effective.

DAWN

Yes! Sean, my friend.

Nervously, Sean Casey nods.

SEAN

Yeah?

DAWN

I need you to put your skills to good use.

SEAN

Does this mean I'm not fired?

DAWN

No! I never go back on my decisions. You were fired, and now you're rehired.

They all look at him, unsure what to do next.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Don't stand there looking like cabbages. Get to work. All of you!

He claps his hands at them.

DAWN (CONT'D)

And I shall pay Mr Geller a visit.

39

INT. FALBO'S PIZZERIA - DAY

39

Mr. Falbo is happily serving a CUSTOMER.

Leonard and Christina are seated at one of the tables enjoying a pizza. Leonard is wearing sunglasses, enjoying his new success a little too much.

On the counter next to the register is a small placard that reads:

WINDOW ART BY LEONARD GELLER.

MR. FALBO

(to the customer)

You see that art in the window?  
That's a Leonard Geller original.  
And it's a painting of me.

It is a painting of Falbo - eating pizza. The customer nods, impressed.

Mr. Falbo hands the customer their change and gives Leonard a thumbs up.

CHRISTINA  
(amused)  
He's really proud of you.

LEONARD  
What can I say? I'm a sensation.

CHRISTINA  
I'm proud of you too.

LEONARD  
I'm proud of me.

CHRISTINA  
You should be.

LEONARD  
I'm glad you came around.

CHRISTINA  
I can admit when I'm wrong. Esteban and Leonard came through. Just don't let all this success change you.

LEONARD  
Never. I'm authentically me. That's why I'm such a hot commodity.

She smiles, a hint of sadness.

CHRISTINA  
Anyway, I'd better get to work.

LEONARD  
Why are you going to work? We're gonna be rich. You don't need to work anymore.

CHRISTINA  
I'm not going to be a kept woman, Leonard.

She leans over, and kisses him on the cheek. She leaves. Leo watches her go out the window.

And then George Dawn sits down opposite, a leering grin on his face, his phone in hand.

DAWN  
Hello, Leonard.

LEONARD  
Ah, George Dawn. Come to gaze into  
the new face of art?

DAWN  
No, I just wanted to see the light  
in your eyes before I snuff it out  
forever.

LEONARD  
Is that a threat? Go ahead then -  
give it your best shot! But it'll  
take more than your ego to crush my  
inspiration.

Dawn chuckles.

DAWN  
We shall see. A cockroach like you  
should have stayed under its rock  
instead of daring to challenge me.  
This city isn't big enough for the  
both of us.

LEONARD  
Sounds like you're the one feeling  
threatened and insecure. But true  
talent can't be extinguished - no  
matter how cunning the schemer. So  
do your worst, Dawn! I'm not going  
anywhere.

Dawn chuckles and walks out of the restaurant.

Leonard is a little confused by the interaction, feeling like  
something is about to go wrong.

40 EXT. THE STREETS - DAY

40

Leonard walks down the street, trying to shake off Dawn's  
threat.

A DUDE passing does a double take and points at Leonard.

DUDE  
Hey! Sculpture guy! Haha! Good  
shit, man.

LEONARD  
Uh, hi. Thanks.

DUDE  
White rules!

He laughs as Leonard watches him go, confused.

BEEP BEEP - a TAXI honks at them and waves.

TAXI DRIVER  
(shouting)  
Nice work, Leo Geller!

Leo's mood starts to lift, shoulders back, head held high, he walks on.

A PUNK across the street shouts--

PUNK  
Hey, Geller! Nice work!

LEONARD  
Uh, thanks? You too?

PUNK  
Saw them putting it up earlier.  
That is some crooked shit, man.

Leonard's confused.

A MOTHER and LITTLE DAUGHTER pass them, and the Mother pulls her child close and away from Leo.

Chad can be seen in the distance, outside the MOMA - addressing a large crowd.

CHAD  
Leonard Geller's latest piece! A  
self portrait! Available for public  
viewing today only! Get the gallery  
experience here at the world-  
renowned MOMA!

Leonard approaches, and sees that the crowd is gathered around something large, beneath a velvet sheet.

Most of the people in the crowd have their phones raised, taking videos and snapping pictures.

Chad spots him.

CHAD (CONT'D)  
Here he is now! The artist.

LEONARD  
What's going on?

CHAD  
I'm about to unveil your newest  
work.

LEONARD  
What?

CHAD  
That's why you called me!

LEONARD  
I didn't call--

CHAD  
-- Perhaps you would like to do the  
honors?

A ripple through the crowd, encouraging him to do so. Chad holds out a golden cord, attached to the sheet.

CHAD (CONT'D)  
I present to you --

The crowd murmurs in anticipation as Chad dramatically pulls away the velvet sheet, revealing the grotesque sculpture.

ANGLE ON SCULPTURE

The sculpture stands at an imposing 18 feet tall. It's a nightmarish amalgamation of twisted metal, decaying animal carcasses, and unsettling mannequin parts. The crowd gasps at the unsettling sight.

INSERT - "WHITE LIVES MATTER" BANNER

Hanging prominently among the nightmarish scene is a banner with the controversial words "WHITE LIVES MATTER."

BACK TO SCENE

The crowd falls into shocked silence as they take in the disturbing display. Leonard grows increasingly uncomfortable.

We see astonished faces in the crowd - eyes wide, jaws slack, phones held up capturing it all. Some even giggle nervously.

CROWD FACE 1  
The hell is that thing??

CROWD FACE 2  
Is it supposed to, like, mean  
something?

CROWD FACE 1  
Nothing worth knowing!

Amongst the murmuring onlookers we catch a glimpse of a familiar face - Dawn, covering his mouth to stifle a mocking laugh.

DAWN  
My my...what an asshole! A big  
racist asshole!

The other crowd members glance at each other, outrage slowly building as they take in the vulgar sculpture.

MAN IN CROWD  
It's a monstrosity! This guy's just  
a disturbed racist.

Murmurs of agreement ripple through the crowd. Leonard shifts uncomfortably, unsure, before slowly turning around and jogging away.

CHAD  
(calling out)  
Leo! Stop! Can you at least tell us  
what are you trying to say?

But Leonard has disappeared.

41 INT. SAM'S GALLERY - DAY

41

Leonard sits cringing with his phone to his ear.

LEONARD  
No mom, that sculpture was NOT my  
work! Someone's trying to frame me!  
Yes I know but--  
(Pulls phone away)  
-- No, you haven't raised me wrong!

He sighs.

LEONARD (CONT'D)  
Just give the phone to dad.  
(pauses)  
Yeah dad--  
(his face turns red)  
What do you mean you're  
disappointed I didn't even...

-- He hangs up, mortified. He looks at Christina.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

They are impossible.

Christina turns to Esteban.

CHRISTINA

How could you let this happen??  
Leonard's life is in ruins!

ESTEBAN

It wasn't us!

CHRISTINA

You started it.

ESTEBAN

Not our mistake that making him  
famous would mean poking a giant  
bear.

CHRISTINA

You didn't poke anything, you  
dropped an atomic bomb! We're  
utterly destroyed thanks to your  
stupidity.

ESTEBAN

Hey, watch it!

Leonard walks over wearily.

LEONARD

Well, at least now no one will  
forget my name, for better or  
worse.

Esteban and Christina stare at him blankly. Leonard sighs.

THROUGH THE FRONT WINDOW - Sam argues with a BUYER. He tries  
to force the buyer to keep one of Leo's pieces.

The Buyer is trying to shove it back at Sam, but Sam isn't  
letting up. They're practically wrestling.

Sam enters holding the Leo painting, and breathing heavily.  
He walks to the desk and sets the art next to the computer.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

This is a disaster. I'm ruined.

CHRISTINA

I warned you something like this  
would happen if we got sucked into  
their vendetta against Dawn?



LEONARD

You seemed pretty okay with it when you saw how rich we were going to be.

CHRISTINA

What is that supposed to mean?

LEONARD

It means... it means -- I don't know what it means.

ESTEBAN

Well, we don't have to worry about being rich anymore. All the work has been returned.

SAM

Do we have any idea who might've made that sculpture?

CHRISTINA

It's obvious who did this. The one person who was most threatened by your lies.

SAM

A little more information...?

CHRISTINA

George Dawn, obviously!

SAM

I've got to ask, Leonard, before I can continue to represent you - are you actually a white nationalist and a pervert?

LEONARD

No! Obviously I'm not a white nationalist and a pervert.

SAM

Well, I just thought -- the sculpture --

LEONARD

Which I had nothing to do with.

SAM

I have to confirm.

Leonard stares at him.

SAM (CONT'D)

Are you or were you ever a white supremacist?

LEONARD

No! Are you mad?

SAM

Do you ever plan on turning into one--

LEONARD

-- Just... Shut up. Okay? Shut up!

SAM

Okay, okay. Had to be sure. Have been getting disturbingly warm calls from Ku Klux Klan.

Leonard looks at him, incredulous.

ESTEBAN

It's not like George hasn't done this sort of thing before to destroy his rivals.

LEONARD

Why didn't you tell me that before we started?

ESTEBAN

I thought it was self-evident.

Christina stands, fuming with rage.

CHRISTINA

Well, good luck to you all sorting this out.

LEONARD

Where are you going?

CHRISTINA

I'm on my lunch, and I'm going back to work, because it looks like we're going to need the money.

LEONARD

But I need you -- I need you to help fix this.

CHRISTINA

You didn't need me when I warned you where this was going.

LEONARD

You should've warned me better!

Christina storms out.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Christina, wait -- !

ESTEBAN

I'm afraid it's over, my boy. At least it was fun while it lasted.

LEONARD

Wait... Aren't we going to do anything about it?

ESTEBAN

There's nothing left to do. We gambled big and lost bigger.

LEONARD

The hell with that! We can't let him get away with this crap. There must be something we can do - find a loophole, a way to fix this. You're the mastermind here.

ESTEBAN

We flew recklessly close to the sun. Now we must accept the fall.

Leonard grabs Esteban's shoulders, desperate.

LEONARD

Don't feed me that poetic bullshit! Are you telling me the great Esteban is gonna tuck tail and hide rather than fight? That's cowardice!

Esteban looks down, ashamed by the truth in Leonard's words.

ESTEBAN

I wish I had an answer. Playing it safe may be our only option now.

Leonard steps back, disgusted and betrayed. Esteban leaves. Sam lingers.

SAM

On the brighter side, I know a few places that offer handsome discounts to white--

LEONARD  
Don't even say the word.

SAM  
Good day.

Sam rushes out, closely following Esteban.

42 INT. LEONARD'S STUDIO - NIGHT 42

Leonard lays on the couch, under a blanket - clearly having been thrown out of the bedroom.

He tosses and turns, and tries to sleep, to no avail.

43 EXT. STREET - DAY 43

Leonard walks the street, head down, collar pulled up to hide his face.

He walks past a gallery, showcasing a new YOUNG ARTIST, who is meeting customers inside.

He walks on

- past a row of posters for George Dawn's next showcase, entitled: THE ART OF REVENGE.

44 INT. LEONARD'S STUDIO - DAY 44

Leonard sits in front of a blank canvas, paintbrush in hand - but no inspiration comes.

He catches sight of Christina, as she leaves, without saying goodbye.

He slumps, sighs.

45 EXT. SAM'S GALLERY - MORNING 45

Sam walks up to his gallery to find George Dawn waiting outside.

DAWN  
Good morning, Samuel.

SAM

What do you want? Come to give me another piece of paper with so much writing on it that I get really confused?

DAWN

I'm here to have a conversation.

SAM

(scoffs)

Now you wanna talk? Get outta here, Georgie boy. I don't give a damn what you have to say. Never did.

Dawn snaps his fingers.

DAWN

Ah, right. I have to speak to you in your language.

Dawn pulls out a fat stack of CASH.

46

INT. SAM'S GALLERY - MOMENTS LATER

46

Sam is counting the money, as George leans on the counter.

SAM

This is just a conversation, right? Nothing else. No tricks.

DAWN

No tricks. I merely wanted to congratulate you on the job you did with young Leonard. It was heartening to realize you still had so much spunk left in you.

SAM

Yeah, well, even old dogs can still bark.

DAWN

Now get me Geller.

SAM

What's Geller?

DAWN

Leonard Geller. Convince him to come and work for me.

SAM

I don't think he's going to agree to that.

DAWN

Hence the 'convince him' part of my request.

SAM

You think you can just come here and buy my loyalty? What do you think I am, an idiot?

DAWN

Well...

SAM

I've got principles. Unlike you.

DAWN

You're literally selling copies of my art as the real thing.

SAM

And you're putting your name to the work of other people. I think that makes us even.

Dawn sighs, softens.

DAWN

Samuel. I know you of old. You're a pragmatist who understands the value of a deal. And this? This is a deal. You're either with me or against me. What's it to be?

Sam weighs it up, and then:

SAM

Sorry, George. I can't. You're just such a dick.

Dawn shakes his head in grave disappointment.

DAWN

Well, you had a good run.

A BEAT, the two staring each other down.

WHOOH WHOOP - A POLICE CAR rolls up to the curb. Two OFFICERS step out and walk directly to Sam.

OFFICER 1  
 Samuel Wolf. We have a warrant for  
 your arrest on multiple charges of  
 fraud and forgery.

SAM  
 What?! No!

OFFICER 1  
 You have the right to remain  
 silent...

As the Officer continues Sam's rights, cuffs him - the Second  
 Officer pats Dawn on the shoulder.

OFFICER 2  
 Thank you, Mr. Dawn. We appreciate  
 everything you've done for this  
 case.

DAWN  
 You're very welcome, Officer. Thank  
 YOU for getting this scum off the  
 streets.

OFFICER 2  
 (holds up his phone)  
 You mind?

DAWN  
 Oh! Please!

They pose for a selfie. The Officer follows his partner. Sam  
 is led out of the gallery.

SAM  
 I've not done anything wrong! This  
 is a set-up!

47

EXT. SPANISH HARLEM - DAY

47

Esteban walks out of a bodega with some groceries.

He fumbles for his keys and pulls them out. Looking up to  
 where he had parked, his VAN is not there.

He looks up and down the street confused.

The FORTUNE TELLER is seated in front of her shop.

FORTUNE TELLER  
 It was stolen.

ESTEBAN

What?

FORTUNE TELLER

Your van. The one with the ugly painting on the side? Yeah, somebody took it.

ESTEBAN

And you didn't stop them?

FORTUNE TELLER

I made a pledge never to intervene in the fates...

ESTEBAN

Oh, do shut-up.

Esteban is at a loss. His PHONE rings: GEORGE DAWN. He answers, furious.

ESTEBAN (CONT'D)

You bastard. I know it was you.

Intercut with:

48

EXT. TACO TRUCK - DAY

48

Dawn eats a taco while on the phone to George.

DAWN

What would that be?

ESTEBAN

You took my van.

DAWN

Oh that. Yes. Yes, I stole your van, Esteban. You should also know that Samuel has been arrested.

Esteban's face drops.

DAWN (CONT'D)

That was my doing too by the way.

ESTEBAN

What the hell, George!? Why are you doing this?



DAWN

Because I know how much you loved that van, and because Sam turned down my offer.

ESTEBAN

What offer?

DAWN

To convince Leonard Geller to work for me.

ESTEBAN

You didn't even make me an offer. You just took my van.

DAWN

Because I knew you would've said no to it.

ESTEBAN

Of course I'd have said no. I hate you.

DAWN

Anyhoo, the van's at the chop shop now. But hey, I'm a generous chap. I'll send you a piece to remember the old girl by.

FORTUNE TELLER

The fates! The fates!

Esteban shakes his head and walks away from the old Dominican Woman, as she slips into some kind of psychic trance.

Dawn enjoys his tacos as he chats lightly, relishing in the power imbalance.

ESTEBAN

Are you honestly this childish? All this because you felt threatened by some kid?

DAWN

It's not about the kid. You made this about me. I'm making it about you. If you tell the kid he works for me now, I'll stop all this and leave you to rot in that gift shop back room. This can all just go away.

ESTEBAN

Which part of 'I hate you' was so difficult to understand, George?

DAWN

I thought you'd say that. Which is why I'm going to ruin the lives of everyone Leonard Geller knows, until he has no choice.

ESTEBAN

(tense)

What are you going to do?

DAWN

Just remember, you could've stopped what comes next.

Smiling, Dawn ends the call.

Esteban turns, face hard, mind whirling.

49

INT. OFFICE - DAY

49

JESSICA - Christina's boss, 30s, no-nonsense - listens to Jill, who sobs dramatically.

JILL

I just don't think I can keep my business here if you allow such inappropriate behavior.

JESSICA

I am so sorry, Ms. Garcia. I understand how shocking this all is, and I assure you, we have been evaluating our options.

JILL

I hope so. I really do.

Jessica stands and shakes Jill's hand sympathetically.

JESSICA

Rest assured, resolving this is our top priority.

JILL

Thank you, Ms. Swenson.

Jill dabs her eyes with a crumpled tissue and walks to the door.

JILL (CONT'D)  
Do you validate?

JESSICA  
Julia will get you at the front  
desk.

Jill nods and walks off.

50 INT. OFFICE - JESSICA'S OFFICE - DAY

50

Jessica sits behind the desk, stern-faced and contemplative,  
as Christina enters.

CHRISTINA  
You wanted to see me?

JESSICA  
Please sit down.

Christina sits down opposite.

CHRISTINA  
Is something wrong?

JESSICA  
What do you have to say about this?

Jessica turns her computer to show a digital sketch of the  
Leonard sculpture.

She swipes, and another sketch appears. Artists online are  
overflowing with inspiration from the sculpture.

JESSICA (CONT'D)  
It's your boyfriend's work is it  
not?

CHRISTINA  
We prefer the term partner.

Jessica glares.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)  
Yes. My boyfriend has been blamed  
for that, but he didn't have  
anything to do with --

JESSICA  
Clients are cancelling their  
accounts with us because of this.  
They don't want to be associated  
with a white supremacist.

CHRISTINA  
How is that - what?!

JESSICA  
It's become a symbol of hatred.  
It's being shared across the  
internet. Hashtag...

She winces, then continues.

JESSICA (CONT'D)  
Hashtag: white lives matter. The  
worst sort of people are rallying  
behind it!

CHRISTINA  
That isn't my fault.

JESSICA  
We have clients with families, who  
are extremely concerned.

CHRISTINA  
Leonard didn't do that. He just  
upset the wrong person, and -- and --  
-- and that person, he --

JESSICA  
I'm letting you go.

CHRISTINA  
What? You can't!

JESSICA  
The company cannot be associated  
with a... racist. It sends  
completely the wrong message.

CHRISTINA  
(flabbergasted)  
I'm -- I -- I --

JESSICA  
(kindly)  
Do you want to cry? Is this crying?  
I have tissues.

CHRISTINA  
No, I don't want to cry!

Jessica picks up her phone quickly.

JESSICA

I'm going to have security escort  
you out.

Christina stands.

CHRISTINA

I'll see myself out, thanks.

Christina storms out:

51 INT. OFFICE - OUTSIDE JESSICA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 51

Christina stomps out

- walks across the office, eyes are on her.

She walks to the elevator, presses the call button, waits,  
seething.

52 INT. ELEVATOR - MOMENTS LATER 52

Christina enters. There's one other person in there. She  
doesn't look at him, as she presses the button for the first  
floor.

The other person is George Dawn.

DAWN

Hello, Christina!

CHRISTINA

Were you waiting for me in here?

DAWN

Yes. I've been going up and down  
for hours. Sorry you lost your job.  
Such a run of bad luck you're  
having.

She realizes he's responsible for her losing her job, gets up  
close into his face.

CHRISTINA

Not sure you thought this through,  
being trapped in a closed  
environment, just the two of us.

Dawn tries to hide how intimidated he is by her.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

What's stopping me from hurting you? I mean - really hurting you.

Then:

DAWN

I'm here as a friend, Christina. I want to help Leonard. I want to help you. I can make the nightmare go away. Just tell him to come and work for me.

The elevator stops and the doors open.

Christina steps out backwards, not breaking eye contact for a moment.

CHRISTINA

He's better than you ever were, so go eat a fucking dick.

The doors slides closed and from inside the elevator we hear:

DAWN

Only on Tuesdays and national holidays, dear.

The doors close on him. He realizes he's going back up, curses silently.

53

INT. LEONARD'S STUDIO - EVENING

53

Leonard sits, and stares at his blank canvas

- as Christina enters.

He realizes that all is not well. She breaks down in tears

- he runs over, and wraps his arms around her.

Over her shoulder, his face is tense, determined.

Christina looks around the studio:

Everything is destroyed - all the artwork ruined, smashed, shredded, broken, gone. She's shocked.

CHRISTINA

What did you do?

LEONARD

It wasn't me.

54 INT. GIFT SHOP - OFFICE - EVENING 54

Esteban enters his office. He flips on the light and walks over to his couch - the fold out bed is open.

He plops down on it and feels something in the sheets next to him.

He reaches over and pulls back the sheets to reveal--

A portion of the mural from the side of his van in his bed, a la The Godfather.

His face hardens into resolve.

55 EXT. SAM'S GALLERY - NIGHT 55

Esteban walks at speed to Sam's Gallery, and stops dead at what he sees - though half suspected.

The window is shattered, the walls torn to pieces.

All the artwork is gone.

56 INT. POLICE STATION - CELL - NIGHT 56

A COP opens a cell. Inside Sam, spoons with a LARGE DRUNK MAN.

COP  
You made bail. Come on.

Sam wriggles free, pats his "friend" on the head gently.

57 INT. POLICE STATION - LOBBY - NIGHT 57

Sam follows the cop to the lobby. He finds Leonard, Christina, and Esteban waiting for him. They all look miserable.

58 EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT 58

Dark clouds cling over the city, glowing from the lights.

The four defeated friends walk down the steps of the station.

SAM  
Who do I owe for the bail?

LEONARD  
(muttering, bitter)  
I sold one of my pieces to a neo-  
Nazi from Montana.

SAM  
Thank you, Leonard. You didn't have  
to do that.

ESTEBAN  
We couldn't leave you in there, old  
friend.

SAM  
It wasn't so bad. A lovely fella  
named Fart made me his - I believe  
they call it - his bitch.

LEONARD  
His name was Fart?

SAM  
Not even a nickname. That was  
literally his name. His parents  
were hippies.

CHRISTINA  
So how does that explain why they  
called him Fart?

Sam takes a deep breath, wistful.

SAM  
He had such strong arms...

ESTEBAN  
Can we focus please, Samuel? George  
Dawn has ruined us all and we can't  
let it stand.

They stop, taking in the sight of THE CITY SKYLINE down the  
street.

CHRISTINA  
What more can he do to us? Let it  
go.

ESTEBAN  
I fear that Dawn has only just  
begun. We stirred a hornet's nest,  
and we'll keep being stung until  
there's nothing left of us.



CHRISTINA

Really trying not to say I told you so.

LEONARD

Would it help if I said you were right, and we were wrong?

CHRISTINA

That actually does help.

LEONARD

Just don't blame Sam and Esteban. I was the one who wanted to go ahead with the plan. All this is on me.

Christina squeezes his hand.

CHRISTINA

It's okay, baby.

LEONARD

It's not okay. I've let you down, and I don't know how to put it right.

ESTEBAN

This is what Dawn wants. He wants you to fall apart. He wants you to fail, to hurt, until you go begging to him to make it stop.

LEONARD

Why though? I'm nobody.

ESTEBAN

Don't you see? Because he's threatened by you, Leonard. He wouldn't have gone this big if he didn't think you would one day be his better. By destroying you, he was cutting off his biggest competition at the root.

LEONARD

I need to fix this.

CHRISTINA

I just want it to finish, Leonard.

Leonard is hit with a burst of inspiration.

LEONARD  
 (to himself)  
 A true artist is never finished...

Tight on Leonard, a plan forming.

LEONARD (CONT'D)  
 Esteban, can you find out everyone  
 who's currently creating art for  
 Dawn? I've got an idea.

ESTEBAN  
 I'll put in a word through some  
 artists. Their circle is strong.  
 But be careful... George would see  
 it coming.

LEONARD  
 He won't. He is relishing in his  
 win right now. He won't think we  
 have what it takes to get back up.

SAM  
 Do we?

LEONARD  
 Yes we have.

SAM  
 Sure.

ESTEBAN  
 What's on your mind.

Leonard smiles.

INT. ESTEBAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Estaban enters his dim apartment, distracted as he opens an envelope slid under his door. Inside is an anonymous letter:

"I know what you are looking for. Meet tomorrow, 9pm at this address if you want justice."

A location in Queens is listed. Intrigued, Esteban narrows his eyes.

EXT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Estaban arrives at a crumbling warehouse. He pulls open a heavy rusty door leading to darkness within.

Flicking his lighter, he GASPS as the flame reveals a graveyard of paintings - beautiful works violently slashed and destroyed.

Venturing deeper, Esteban examines the ruined pieces, crestfallen. A floorboard CREAKS behind him. Spinning around, Esteban holds up the lighter, shadows dancing.

From the darkness, a tall FIGURE steps forth - broad-shouldered in a ball cap and coat. Esteban stands firm, meeting his obscured face.

FIGURE

Like my collection? Such wasted potential.

The Figure stays obscured in shadow. Esteban realizes and smiles.

ESTEBAN

You--

CUT TO:

59

INT. LAWYERS OFFICE - DAY

59

A LAWYER looks over a contract. This is not a high priced lawyer.

This is the shady lawyer who is good at finding loopholes and fighting dirty.

He nods his head. Furrows his brow.

Across from him are Sam, Esteban, Leonard, and Christina...

- and Sean, George Dawn's current resident artist.

Finally, the lawyer lowers the contract. Shuffles all of the contracts that are in front of him.

LAWYER

Have I got this right? You were hired to create works for George Dawn?

Sean nods.

ESTEBAN

Dawn purchased Sean's work, and took full credit.

SEAN

He's been doing it for years. He's got a whole sweat shop set up.

LAWYER

The contract you signed is ironclad. I'm not sure what you expect me to do.

Disappointment races through the room.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

It states clearly that upon completion, the work became the property of George Dawn, to do with as he wished.

LEONARD

That's the problem, you see.

LAWYER

Oh?

LEONARD

These works were never finished. Isn't that right?

Sean nods, enthusiastically.

SEAN

Yeah. He displayed them before I was done. Totally.

The lawyer is confused.

LEONARD

It wasn't for Dawn to say that the works were finished. It was up to the artists.

LAWYER

I see. Well, that changes everything. Leave it with me.

Everyone's face lights up. Leonard has done it. He grins at Sean.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

Though there's the small matter of payment for my services --

Leonard pulls out his wallet, stuffed with money. The others look at it, surprised. He shrugs.

LEONARD  
Neo-Nazi in Montana.

60

INT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS GALLERY - NIGHT

60

George Dawn's newest art showcase.

All of "his" latest pieces are arranged; the same mix of pretentious and pseudo-profound.

Dawn walks amongst them. Proud and arrogant. He shakes hands with numerous members of the ART SCENE ELITE.

Hidden among them, in disguise, are Sam, Esteban, and Christina.

Leonard enters his hands held high

- joined by Sean, and a dozen other artists, from Dawn's stable.

Dawn's face drops.

LEONARD  
Ladies, gentlemen, and everyone else. I am Leonard Geller.

Gasps of recognition. The response is a mix of cheers, shock, and confusion.

LEONARD (CONT'D)  
Some of you may know me as the artist responsible for the big sculpture outside the Moma. A clear statement denouncing prejudice that, unfortunately, was misinterpreted by many.

Dawn smirks, clearly thinking Leonard is no threat.

DAWN  
You are pathetic. If you think you can--

-- Leonard holds up a document.

LEONARD  
I hold in my hand a contract, similar to the one signed by the artists beside me. The contract they were all made to sign by George Dawn, allowing him to put his name on their work.

More gasps, hushed whispers.

DAWN

Lies. All of it lies. I'd expect nothing less from a prejudiced racist.

SEAN

He's telling the truth.

DAWN

Oh, do be quiet, you hack.

LEONARD

As the contract states, the work was never meant to be displayed until the artists declared it finished. All of the pieces you see here today are considered mere works-in-progress by their true creators.

More gossiping among the crowd.

DAWN

Don't listen to him. He's bitter. Jealous.

LEONARD

But good news! Because today, these talented artists are here to finish the work they begun for George Dawn.

Suddenly, all of the artists with Leonard take out baseball bats, axes, hammers, and sledgehammers.

DAWN

Stop! What are you doing?

A hush overtakes the crowd.

And then all of the artists race to destroy the art they created.

DAWN (CONT'D)

No! You can't!

The crowd turns to Dawn. He stands there, not moving, frozen in place, stunned.

He tries to laugh it off.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Ha ha! Yes, this is a very interesting performance piece that I conceived. It's all part of the show. Feel free to place bids.

One of the artists smashes a sculpture on the floor. Dawn shrieks.

DAWN (CONT'D)

Stop! I'd just sold that to a dealer in Paris!

LEONARD

Sorry, George.

Sam, Esteban and Christina come over.

SAM

They're just doing what you contracted them for, George.

ESTEBAN

It's all quite legal, old friend.

CHRISTINA

And there's nothing you can do to stop them.

Furious, Dawn charges through the stunned crowd toward Leonard. The room goes silent.

DAWN

You pathetic, talentless hack! Who the hell do you think you are?

LEONARD

I know exactly who I am. A real artist, not a fraud like you.

Murmurs spread through the crowd. Dawn forces a laugh.

DAWN

Is that what Esteban told you? That poor fool can't accept that I succeeded where he failed.

LEONARD

You didn't succeed - you lied and backstabbed your way up, stealing credit from actual artists!

DAWN

And who made you the authority on art? A failed painter so desperate for fame you tried exploiting my name? Pathetic.

Leonard steps closer, trembling but resolute. The crowd watches tensely.

LEONARD

You took the easy route pretending greatness. But real visionaries manifest their demons through integrity, not deceit.

Dawn bristles, but doubt flickers in his steel eyes. Patrons shift, unsettled by inconvenient truths.

DAWN

Who determines what "greatness" is? The arbiters of taste who hoard opportunities for their chosen few? I claimed my rightful place by their biased standards!

He gestures around aggressively. Leonard calmly shakes his head.

LEONARD

At what cost? How many dreams did you dominate to decorate this hollow hall, built by exploiting unfair rules rather than changing them?

Dawn opens his mouth to retaliate...but finds no words. Murmurs begin to spread through the crowd again.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

You perpetuated the gatekeepers' biases rather than rising above them. Newcomers now feel that selling out is the only ticket in. For what - bolstering the status quo?

He looks around pointedly at the elite crowd and posh gallery.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

I bought into your way too, thinking real artists sacrifice integrity. That legacy meant doing whatever it takes for fame.



Patrons avert their gaze guiltily. Esteban nods subtly in approval. Dawn's swagger diminishes with each volley, doubts surfacing.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

But genuine influence exposes hard truths rather than spinning dreams. It's digging work no one sees so others might savor the fruits of your labor.

Leonard leans inches from Dawn's face. The mogul refuses meeting his eyes directly.

LEONARD (CONT'D)

Chasing fleeting glory never leaves behind anything real or lasting. I prefer illuminating the darkness in quiet service of honest expression. That inspires long after the lights go out on any marquee bearing your name. And that's something you will never achieve.

A PAUSE...

Then slow APPLAUSE spreads. Dawn reels back, exposed. Guests turn away, rejecting him. Victorious, Leonard exits with head held high, his passion reborn.

SEAN

Everyone, help me finish my art!

Within moments, chaos breaks out

- as everyone in the room joins the artists in smashing up the art, and trashing the gallery.

Dawn stands helplessly as destruction moves around him. It's like his world has slowed down, before pausing for good. A long moment where he all alone in his crimes.

61

EXT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS GALLERY - LATER

61

Dawn is being led away to a police car, in handcuffs as Leonard, Christina, Esteban, Sam and Sean look on, satisfied.

A press photographer takes a photo of Dawn as he's bundled into the car.

62

INT. HOME - BROOKLYN - DINING ROOM - EVENING

62

Harry, Barb, Leonard, and Christina are seated at the table.  
They eat take-out pizza.

BARB

If you would have given me more of  
a heads up, I would have cooked  
something.

CHRISTINA

Take-out pizza is perfect, Barb.

BARB

Well, c'mon. Why the surprise

LEONARD

We... well, there's something we  
want to share with you.

Barb squeals, excited.

BARB

You finally did it!

LEONARD

Mom!

HARRY

Let the boy get it out. Jesus,  
Barb.

BARB

I'm sorry. I'm just... can I see  
the ring?

LEONARD

There's no --

Barb grabs Christina's hand. Looks for a ring.

BARB

You proposed without a ring?

LEONARD

It was a spur of the moment thing.

BARB

You've been dating for ages. How is  
that spur of the... Harry! He  
didn't get a ring.

LEONARD

I'm saving up.

CHRISTINA

Money's a little tight at the moment.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

Honestly, he could tie a piece of string around my finger and it would be good enough for me.

BARB

Why don't you sell some of your art?

LEONARD

I don't know. Right now I'm feeling inspired to create without the pressure to sell.

HARRY

You can still have an art party here.

BARB

That's right! Chad Halvorsen was asking after you.

HARRY

It's called an exhibit, not a party.

BARB

Whatever it's called. Maybe we can do it at my bridge club. There's plenty of women there you could show your work to. It's not just Chad Halvorsen. Lots of women like paintings too.

LEONARD

You know what, that sounds like a great idea. Thanks mom.

BARB

Just promise me you'll take some of that money and buy a ring for your beautiful fiancé.

LEONARD

I promise.

HARRY

Say, after dinner, could you take a look at my laptop, son? I think it got some more of those virus things.

63

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - DAY

63

The place is full of Leonard's new work.

It also has work from all of the artists that Dawn ripped off - who stand next to their work, proudly, mingling with SENIOR CITIZENS, talking them through their art.

Christina, Harry, Barb, and Leonard make their way around.

Christina has a fanny pack.

A LADY WITH RED HAIR (65) hands a painting to Christina. While Christina holds it, the lady takes out a wad of cash.

She hands it to Christina in exchange for the painting.

CHRISTINA

Thank you.

RED HAIRED LADY

Thank you. You should do this again next month. My divorce will be final and I'll have more of my ex-husband's money to spend.

CHRISTINA

We'll see if we can come back.

The Red Haired Lady smiles and wanders off.

Christina makes her way up to Leonard.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)

This is incredible.

LEONARD

I've spent so much time trying to impress a bunch of art snobs who never buy anything, I didn't realize I could be selling my work to other people.

ESTEBAN

I'm so proud of you, Leonard. You've come so far.

LEONARD  
Thank you for believing in me.

She smiles.

CHRISTINA  
Always.

LEONARD  
The only drawback is I'm never  
going to hear the end of it from my  
mom.

CHRISTINA  
Probably not.

Something catches Leonard's attention; Sam and Esteban enter.  
They're headed straight for them.

Christina notices them a moment later. As soon as they're  
close enough...

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)  
I wasn't sure yo could make it.

ESTEBAN  
I heard congratulations are in  
order.

CHRISTINA  
Thank you!

SAM  
I was married a few times. Didn't  
ever work out. They both left me  
for sea captains. What are the  
chances?

Esteban takes in the area.

ESTEBAN  
So this is what you're doing now?

LEONARD  
I'm just... creating for myself.

SAM  
And this untapped market.  
Disposable income. Smart. Very  
smart.

He looks at all the attendees.

SAM (CONT'D)  
How much money have you made today?

CHRISTINA  
About thirty grand.

Sam can't believe what he just heard.

SAM  
Wowzers. Gotta be a lot of widows  
in here with cash to burn. I'm  
gonna go work the room.

Sam straightens his clothes, and heads off to introduce  
himself to a glamorous elderly woman.

They all smile, amused.

ESTEBAN  
Heard the latest about George Dawn?

LEONARD  
Oh?

ESTEBAN  
Once the law started looking at his  
contracts, IRS got involved. Sounds  
like he's going away for tax  
evasion.

CHRISTINA  
Couldn't happen to a nicer guy.

Raised voices get their attention

- as the elderly woman slaps Sam around the face, and stomps  
away. The others laugh.

The sound of an ELABORATE TRUCK HORN fills the room.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)  
Is that -- ?

LEONARD  
Chad Halvorsen. Yup. And I know  
just the piece for him.

Reveal a painting by Leonard of a MONSTER TRUCK.

FADE OUT.